

## Personal Creativity by Bess Worley

As I began thinking about this column and the subject, creativity, I reflected on my studies in gifted education and my own experience as a musician and performer. I cycled through various ideas about creativity and different “creative” ways to approach the topic (you were almost subjected to a column that could be “sung to the tune of...”), as well as intense introspection. Finally, while reading an assigned chapter for class, I came back around to two main ideas: creativity as innovation and creativity that emerges from a foundation of knowledge (Bereiter, 2002). Then I asked myself, “Can I be innovative without knowledge? Can I have knowledge and not be innovative?”

Innovation is the most common understanding of creativity. We praise the newest technology (the Segway™), hail the latest spin on a traditional design (the pasta pot), and scramble to acquire gadgets that will improve our lives (digital wireless phones). The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *creative* as “characterized by originality; imaginative” but *create* as “to cause to exist; to produce.” Can I create something that isn’t original? Certainly! Chocolate chip cookies! What if I imagined it without knowing it already existed? It is original to me, but is this creative?

A less acknowledged aspect of creativity is the knowledge base that supports innovation. Before you can “build a better mousetrap” you have to study what did and did not work before. But what about individuals who make significant contributions to the world before accumulating knowledge and experience in a certain field? Are they creative? What about a child’s finger painting? Or the marketing intern’s ad campaign idea that isn’t heard because she’s only an intern? Are these creative?

Finally, what is the place of creativity in education? How do knowledge and innovation fit into the education equation? Can we teach students of any age to be creative and to take risks? I believe we can help students develop knowledge and skills in many areas, as well as the wisdom of when to apply both. We can encourage and support students of any age to take risks with their ideas--to be innovative, and to accept and offer critique through discussion. We can allow students to develop their personal creativity as they learn and grow as individuals and members of society.

Bereiter, C. (2002). *Education and mind in the knowledge age*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.